

# Educational capital and the role of informal education of youth from Cieszyn Silesia<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to analyse the importance of educational capital. In post-communist societies such as Poland, the process of shaping the social structure is slightly different compared to societies such as France or England. In this situation, the role of education may turn out to be much more important in acquiring cultural capital. The research was carried out in Poland, in Cieszyn Silesia, in schools located in Cieszyn, Skoczów, Ustroń and Istebna between October 2012 and January 2013. The research group consisted of students from high schools and colleges. The year of birth of the students was between 1994-1997. The total number of students of secondary schools in 2012/2013 was 5413. Survey results show that in Cieszyn Silesia, social capital acts as a kind of transmitter between inherited and acquired capital and helps acquire high educational capital.

**Keywords:** Educational capital, Cieszyn Silesia, Youth

## **Introduction**

Pierre Bourdieu—a French sociologist emphasizes many times that the successes or failures of students at school do not mean that students of one group are more gifted than students of another group, but they provide information on what competence they have been equipped with (Bourdieu, 1996). He assumes that this competence can be acquired in the family (in the form of inherited capital) or at school (in the form of acquired capital). Similarly to social capital, how it is used depends on many factors, especially cultural competence. That is why, for example, the high rate of participation in non-governmental organizations must be explained by factors hidden from common knowledge. On the other hand, in post-communist societies such as Poland, the process of shaping the social structure is slightly different compared to societies such as France or England. In this situation, the role of education may turn out to be much more important in acquiring cultural capital. In this article, I will discuss the role and importance of educational capital for youth from Cieszyn, Silesia.

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<sup>1</sup> Revised and extended version of *Kapitał kulturowy i społeczny młodzieży na Śląsku Cieszyńskim* (Cultural and social capital of young people in Cieszyn Silesia), Wydawnictwo Chronicon, Wrocław 2020, ss 149-152; 194-197

## Research Problem

Within the presented article, the following issues will be discussed:

- 1) Do young people have a large educational capital?
- 2) What is the role of nonformal education in acquiring educational capital?
- 3) Do cultural and social competences affect educational capital?

## Research Focus

Learning a natural or foreign language is a process consisting of those activities that occur as part of formal learning (formal education), mainly lessons at school, and those activities that occur outside school in the form of, let us call it, language practice (informal education). According to Bourdieu, nonformal education is a process of acquiring cultural capital in the family, while formal education can be defined as school teaching of culture. Informal education plays a special role in the practical mastery of a language. According to Bourdieu, it is much more important than other factors, as it has a fundamental impact on shaping the habitus and provides the school with information on the cultural capital of students. It happens, according to the sociologist mentioned above, that it is in the second dimension (informal education) that the actual acquisition of skills that are required and enforced by school formal education occurring. Therefore, he distinguishes between two ways of acquiring capital through experience and knowledge in the process of learning the language. Knowledge is a set of rules that we acquire at school, and experience is its practical aspect (Bourdieu, 1996).

## Research Methodology

### Research General Background

According toward Bourdieu, the attitude to school knowledge differs depending on which social class the individual belongs to. For example, the new petty bourgeoisie has a fairly high capital acquired in the family and a very low educational capital. This is due to the fact that having high inherited capital, acquiring educational capital is marginal to the success of an individual in social life.

## Research Sample

The total number of students of secondary schools in 2012/2013 was 5413.<sup>2</sup> The sample size was calculated from the formula:  $n = N / ((1 + d^2(N-1)) / u^2 pq)$  (Greń, 1984, 245). An actually implemented sample, after about 20 questionnaires were rejected, due to missing data, it was  $n = 318$ , while the actual error was  $d = 5.3\%$ , which is a fully satisfactory result. The research was carried out between October 2012 and January 2013. The research group consisted of students from high schools and colleges (with and without A-level)<sup>3</sup>. The year of birth of the students was between 1994-1997 for 98.3% of all. The research was carried out in Poland, in Cieszyn Silesia, in schools located in Cieszyn, Skoczów, Ustroń and Istebna.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Wydział Edukacji (faculty of education) <https://www.powiat.cieszyn.pl/>

<sup>3</sup> Advanced level qualifications (known as A levels) are subject-based qualifications that can lead to university, further study, training, or work. In Polish educational system it has been called - "matura".

## Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected using one paper questionnaire [ankieta audoryjna) filled by students during their classes. The questionnaire included 71 questions was divided into 4 section. First section was referring to the socio-economic and demographic data, the second section to the cultural capital, the third section to the social capital and fourth to the educational capital. This paper is limited to analyzing only the questions that concern educational capital.

## Research Result

### Knowledge - the sphere of formal education

As shown by the data in Table 37, almost 99.6% of young people declared that they have attended the English language, which may be an indicator of increasingly visible transnational trends, illustrated by the phenomenon of globalization and the convergence of cultures. The German language came second with the result of 86.5%, which proves the German influence, which appeared in other statements, and some young people see greater prospects for themselves in Germany. Interestingly, the Czech border does not arouse interest, as shown by the data related to learning the Czech language. Only 1.3% of the youth declared that they attended Czech lessons at school. Besides, the problem seems to be of a dual nature. On the one hand, it is related to the lack of a school offering the course of Czech language. On the other hand, the problem is also institutional, which has consequences in the regulations that make it difficult to integrate the community from the borderland.<sup>4</sup> Languages such as French (20.8%) and Russian (11.6) are much more popular. In the case of the French language, this is related to the school's possibility of exchanging students with French schools.

Table no.1. Foreign languages lessons which youth from Cieszyn Silesia attended in schools (primary or secondary school).

Foreign Languages	N=318
English	99,6 %
German	86,5 %
French	20,8 %
Russian	11,6 %
Latin	8,2 %
Spanish	1,3 %
Czech	1,3 %
Japanese	0,6 %

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<sup>4</sup> This phenomenon can be observed by every tourist crossing the border in Cieszyn to the Czech Republic, because the regulations in these border towns do not allow taxi drivers to carry passengers across the border from one city to another. This does not favor integration. A completely different phenomenon occurs in the cities of Świnoujście and Ahlbeck, where there are joint projects concerning public transport and cycling.

Italian	0,3 %
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The declaration of the knowledge of the language considered best mastered looks a bit different. 87% of young people declared that it was English. Subsequent languages have achieved much lower results. 4.4% of young people mastered the German language best. These data show even more clearly the role of the universal globalization of culture, which forces the knowledge of English, as it appears very often during various activities of young people (music, computer games, etc.). The German language, which achieved a high percentage of answers in the previous question in formal education, clearly loses to English. This may indicate the important role of the Internet and the network society, which is becoming closer to young people than, for example, border communities. These data indicate that German influence is declining significantly.

**Table no.2. The foreign language is assessed as best mastered.**

<b>Foreign Languages</b>	<b>N=315</b>
<b>English</b>	<b>87,7 %</b>
<b>German</b>	<b>4,4 %</b>
<b>None</b>	<b>3,5 %</b>
<b>French</b>	<b>1,3 %</b>
<b>Russian</b>	<b>0,9 %</b>
<b>Czech</b>	<b>0,6 %</b>
<b>Spanish</b>	<b>0,6 %</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>100 %</b>

### **Experience - the sphere of linguistic practice (informal education)**

Most of the youth (72.6%) declared that they had the opportunity to use a foreign language in practical situations. 41% did it while on vacation, 25.5% in accidental situations at home or abroad, which gives a total of 66.5%, which is a result of sporadic language practice opportunities. Communication on the Internet is the next (21%). This is an example of the functioning of the Internet as a platform enabling, inter alia, language practice. Another, let us call it a more traditional way of using language in practice, was the activity organized by schools. 13.8% of young people had the opportunity to speak a foreign language during school trips or exchange. Although the youth of this region live in the border area, only 7.9% indicated everyday situations as those in which they use a foreign language. This is the result of the use of the dialect by most of the inhabitants, both on the Czech and Polish side. Of course, the dialect on the Czech side is slightly different from that on the Polish side, but they are largely similar languages, and it is the dialect most often used by the inhabitants of Cieszyn and Czech Cieszyn<sup>5</sup>. For 6% of the respondents, language camps contributed to the practical possibility of practicing a foreign language. About 10% of the

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<sup>5</sup> Information has been obtained on the basis of own observation, field research and shopping on both sides of the border. I noticed that most often in the morning a large group of Czechs went to Poland for shopping. The reverse tendency was less common.

youth showed their own ingenuity in initiating situations in which practical learning occurred without such necessity. I mean passive and active work on the text. The internet has a lot of credit for this, but not only. The subcategories that fall into the above-mentioned forms, e.g., listening to songs, reading, translating, and computer games, indicate a combination of learning and entertainment. An interesting conclusion can be drawn from this. These data show that there is no visible border between learning (and work) and play. This is related to the historical and cultural way of interpreting the high activity of the inhabitants of Cieszyn Silesia, which is certainly related to the features of Protestantism, which contribute precisely to the emphasis on work as a superior value. This value is the opposite of negatively understood work in many other environments. It can also partly explain the relatively high percentage of inhabitants of Cieszyn Silesia, as a whole, in non-governmental organizations.

Table no. 3. Practical use of language.

Linguistic activity	N=318
Vacation trips	41,2 %
Random situations at home or abroad: shop, asking for directions	25,5 %
Communication on the Internet	21,4 %
School exchange or school trip	13,8 %
Everyday situations: communication with family, friends, at school, in the shop	7,9 %
Language camps	6,6 %
Work / paid trips	6 %
Passive work on text: listening to songs, movies, reading the press or books	5 %
Active work with text: writing, translating, programming, computer games	4,4 %
Activity in the organization: sports, culture, religion	3,5 %
Writing letters	2,2 %
Trips to family or friends	2,8 %

### **Relations between educational, cultural, and social capital**

The following research results show the role that school plays in the lives of young people from Cieszyn Silesia. To find it out, I decided to learn what is the place of the school in the daily schedule and what the activities related to it in the free time after the students return home.

Table no. 4. Preparation time for the lesson.

How much time, on average, do you spend each day preparing for lessons?	N=31 8
More than three hours	13,8 %

Up to three hours	21,1 %
Up to two hours	23,6 %
Up to an hour	27,7 %
I am not preparing at all	13,8 %
In total	100 %

According to the conducted research, only 13.8% of the respondents declared no activity related to learning at home. On the other hand, over 80% of young people spend time preparing for school activities. 13% spend a lot of time on it over three hours. Slightly more (more than 20%), learn for the lesson for up to three hours, 23.6% prepare for less than two hours, and 27.7% do it even shorter, i.e. less than an hour. Another issue raised in the research was to illustrate how students solve school problems, and precisely where and from whom they seek help. It turned out that the most popular way to solve school tasks and problems is to work independently with a book or Internet, which was chosen by 81.8% of students. This result deserves attention, because this independence among young people from Cieszyn Silesia is not accidental. It is related to high social capital, and thus a lot of social activity.<sup>6</sup> It also results from a specific disposition or attitude developed thanks to the historical and cultural conditions<sup>7</sup>. Due to the specific situation in Cieszyn Silesia, the Bourdieu model, assuming a complete separation between educational capital and inherited capital, does not fully work in Cieszyn Silesia. Bourdieu emphasizes that in order to be successful in school, one must first acquire knowledge and cultural skills in the family. If this was the case with the respondents, it could be assumed that the most popular way to solve school problems would be advice from parents. It seems reasonable to extend this model to include social capital, which Bourdieu mentions, but does not write about it in detail. For him, social capital is only one of many capitals. In Cieszyn Silesia, social capital acts as a kind of transmitter between inherited and acquired capital. It makes the family no longer monopoly on the transfer of cultural capital, it can also be partially acquired by operating in nongovernmental, secular, or religious organizations.

It should be noted that the second most popular method of solving school problems is seeking help from peers (33%), seeking help from parents comes the third (22.1% of youth choices). Interestingly, the lowest percentage of answers was received by teachers (15.7%) and tutors (11%). It should be noted that the help of the so-called professional tutors grows with the disproportion resulting not from what is taught, but from what is required. It was the basis of Bourdieu's main thesis on symbolic violence (Bourdieu, Passeron, 1977). The

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of social capital, see book: Dyczek B., *Kapitał kulturowy i społeczny młodzieży na Śląsku Cieszyńskim*, Wydawnictwo Chronicon, Wrocław 2020

<sup>7</sup> Mentioned in the historical chapter of the book Dyczek B., *Kapitał kulturowy i społeczny młodzieży na Śląsku Cieszyńskim*, Wydawnictwo Chronicon, Wrocław 2020

relatively low interest in tutoring among young people from Cieszyn Silesia is another sign that the disproportion in schools in Cieszyn Silesia is so low that there is no need to use the services of people who have knowledge for "insiders".

Table No. 5. How do you usually learn? How do you deal with problems?<sup>8</sup>

Ways to deal with problems	N=318
1. I can handle myself - I am looking for an answer in a book or on the Internet	81,8 %
2. I prefer to ask a friend	33 %
3. I am asking for help from my parents	20,1 %
4. I go to the teacher and ask for help	15,7 %
5. I believe it is best to use professional tutoring	11 %

Another problem that arises when talking about school reality is the so-called favorite subjects and, in general, a division into important and less important disciplines. A division, behind which there is a certain teaching ideology, which includes, among others, the nature of the school curriculum and hence the hierarchy of subjects (Szymański, 2006, 67). According to Bourdieu, subjects like Mathematics and Physics are the basic criteria for exclusion from school (Bourdieu, 1996). It can be assumed that the reason for this is the specificity of these disciplines, which is associated with the need to master a specific vision of reality expressed in the language of mathematics. It is well known that mastering any language, including the language of science, requires a lot of work and therefore also it takes time, and in the case of mathematics and physics, much more should be devoted to it, because to master mathematical knowledge you need accuracy and precision.

It is interesting how, in this context, young people ranked their favorite subjects in the hierarchy of importance. It can be assumed that in most cases it will be the field in which a given respondent is most successful. Out of all young people, 72.5% declared that they had a favorite subject at all. Which is quite a large percentage and informs about the significant successes of young people at school. A similar result was achieved with the next question regarding the level of sympathy for schools. Well, 74.5% more or less like going to school. 58.5% of respondents believe that school is important or essential in their lives, but over 1/3 of young people did not know how to place the role of school in their lives. When asked about their favorite subject, PE(physical education) was the most popular (24.8%), it should not be surprising, because, as the data on social capital will show, young people from this region spend their free time very actively<sup>9</sup>, and the organizations they belong to, often apart from cultural, are of a sports nature. In this context, it is worth paying attention to the division of educational styles that Bourdieu refers to, going back to distant history, but still valid today. According to the French researcher, there are two types of school markets. The

<sup>8</sup> Do not add up to 100%, multiple responses.

<sup>9</sup> The social capital of youth from Cieszyn Silesia will be discussed in the incoming article



first is related to the valuation of strong character, energy and will as well as sport, which are features related to the entrepreneurial sense, the second, on the contrary, treats intelligence and culture as priorities (Bourdieu, 1996). The division described by Bourdieu is also visible in the responses of young people from Cieszyn Silesia. Subjects in the first two places, PE and biology (geography and chemistry can also be included), which together gained 50%, are associated with an approach that valorizes the sports and body aspect. On the other hand, subsequent subjects, such as: English, history, Polish, mathematics, and French, definitely emphasize the cultural and artistic aspect.

On the other hand, when asked about the role that high school and colleges education should play in later life, the answers are more varied. However, over 50% believe that the school is important or essential, and over 30% do not know what to say about it, while less than 9% consider the school to be of little or no importance at all. These data presumably indicate quite large educational capital. These answers show that young people appreciate education, even though they do not like it at all, as shown by the answers to the next question, over 60% assess their emotional attitude towards school as average, and approx. 25% openly declare that they do not like going to school at all schools.

Table No. 6. Favorite school subjects

School subjects	N=226	Frequency
PE	24,8 %	56
Biology	14,2 %	32
English	12,8 %	29
History	10,2 %	23
Polish	10,2 %	23
Maths	7,5 %	17
Geography	5,3 %	12
Chemistry	4,4 %	10
French	1,6 %	4

Table 7. The role of school in life.

How important is school in your life?	N=313	Frequency
Very important	9,3 %	29
Important	49,2 %	154
Not important	5,4 %	17
Not important at all	3,5 %	11
Hard to say	32,6 %	102
In total	100 %	313

Table no. 8. Sympathy for school.

How much do you like going to school?	N=317	Frequency
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1. Very	12,0 %	38
2. Medium	62,5 %	198
3. I don't like it at all	25,6 %	81
In total	100 %	317

## Discussions

### The importance of school capital

Bourdieu describes three dimensions of cultural capital, which he calls embodied, objectified, and institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1983, 1986), but only the embodied form was used in these studies. This form consists of the competence of an individual such as consciousness of conventionalities, knowledge about different forms of high culture and cultural taste. As part of social capital activity in social organizations, trust in public institutions and relatives and professed values have been taken into account (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993)<sup>10</sup>.

Table no. 9. Cultural capital and school importance

How important is school in your life?	Cultural capital		
	low	medium	high
Very important	9,8%	9,1%	25,8%
Important	13,2%	30,5%	50,1%
Not important	57,1%	20,1%	7,5%
Not important at all	14,5%	36,6%	11,7%
Hard to say	5,4%	3,7%	4,9%
In total	100%	100%	100%

Table no. 10. social capital and school importance

How important is school in your life?	Social capital		
	low	mediu m	high
Very important	11,5%	12,3%	29,8%
Important	11,5%	35,7%	55,1%
Not important	60,1%	20,2%	5,5%
Not important at all	11,1%	19,3%	6,7%
Hard to say	5,8%	3,5%	2,9%
In total	100%	100%	100%

<sup>10</sup> More on the conceptualization of social and cultural capital in: Dyczek B., *Kapitał kulturowy i społeczny młodzieży na Śląsku Cieszyńskim*, Wydawnictwo Chronicon, Wrocław 2020

School capital, as one of the elements of cultural capital, plays a fundamental role in the intellectual development of young people. Having it adapts young people to life in society, and helps them fulfill appropriate social roles in the future. It turns out that the higher the cultural and social capital, the more often young people consider education important in their lives. Educational institutions' goal is to ensure a high level of knowledge transferred by schools. This task is fulfilled to a large extent by schools in Cieszyn Silesia, as evidenced by the number of high school graduates admitted to universities in popular fields of study. Statistical research carried out by me in schools in Cieszyn Silesia confirms the hypothesis about the traditional care in this area for the best education of young people. The knowledge about culture, generally understood, is mainly obtained by students at school, but it is also the result of their own search for young people, the peer environment, and the family. She draws knowledge about culture not only from books but also from the Internet.

### **Conclusions**

The main research question was: Does young people have a large educational capital? It turned out that young people emphasize the role of education and a high level of education in their lives (50% of the respondents marked this answer). The research showed also that the family had a big influence on this attitude of young people. The youth declared that about 75% of their parents are actively participating in their learning process. The relatively good economic situation of young people (only 2.7% of unemployed fathers) allows them to focus on their own interests and enables them to go to university (84.5%). When discussing educational capital, it is also worth mentioning that physical education lessons were in the first place in the hierarchy of favorite subjects, however, national trends show the opposite. Releasing students from sports activities becomes a common issue. Young people from Cieszyn Silesia show interest in sports activities and willingly take part in sports competitions. Most of the social organizations to which the students belong are of a sports nature. Playing sports teaches young people many social competences, including: it triggers group thinking or team spirit and develops the need for proper competition. It also means the ability to accept "defeat", and this phenomenon is a natural consequence of social life, manifesting itself in a situation of a limited amount of goods. Of course, how students use the possibilities of the school depends largely on the primary socialization and values internalized by young people. The family, however, performs an educational function rather than the function of transmitting knowledge.

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